Best Practices for Implementation of K-3 Literacy Tutoring Programs Using National Service

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Policy Analysis Exercise

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In 2015, approximately two-thirds of fourth and eighth graders in the United States scored below proficient in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Moreover, wide gaps persisted when scores were broken down by race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. While these scores continued a general upward trend since the early 1990s, they demonstrate that there is still a great need to enhance support for our nation's students.

With programs like AmeriCorps, Senior Corps and the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) works to reduce such disparities and improve outcomes for students falling behind. Through school districts and community- and faith-based organizations across the country, national service offers a cost-effective and scalable model for harnessing human capital to do this important work.

Research Objectives

The value of this report lies in a comparative case study analysis across three evidence-based programs, examining the service delivery, operations, and implementation of K-3 literacy tutoring programs that use national service members. It is written in an effort to develop shared elements of effective practice.

The following programs were selected as case studies because they have a well-documented, statistically significant impact on literacy skills based on randomized controlled trials. Case studies of these programs were built from an assessment of the relevant academic literature, a review of

impact evaluations and process assessments, and interviews with senior leaders and staff.

Reading Partners. A one-on-one K-4 tutoring program operating in 10 states and Washington DC, this report assesses the Reading Partners program in DC. Reading Partners receives funding from AmeriCorps and SIF. AmeriCorps members serve as site and volunteer coordinators at schools where the program is implemented, with some members also serving as tutors.

AARP Foundation Experience Corps. A one-on-one and small-group tutoring program that aims to simultaneously improve K-3 literacy and improve the lives of the nation's seniors, Experience Corps programs are hosted by organizations in 16 states and DC. This report assesses the program run by Experience Corps' affiliate Generations Incorporated, serving Boston and Revere, Massachusetts. Experience Corps receives funding from AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and SIF. A subset of Experience Corps members may also become national service members. Experience Corps members, including any AmeriCorps or Senior Corps members, serve as tutors.

Reading Corps. A one-on-one and small-group tutoring program that began in Minnesota and has since been replicated in 12 states and DC. This report focuses on Minnesota Reading Corps, serving schools in urban and rural areas across the state. Minnesota Reading Corps receives AmeriCorps funds and AmeriCorps members serve as tutors.

Key Findings

A comparative analysis of these case studies produced a number of findings, across five areas.

1. **Service Delivery.** Organizations serve low-income and high-need schools through one-on-one tutoring multiple times a week.
2. **Coordination.** Organizations develop formal agreements with district and school partners. On-site coordinators are embedded in a tiered staffing structure aimed at supporting tutors and students.
3. **Training.** Training tutors is an ongoing process that begins with pre-service training and continues throughout the tutor's tenure. In addition to formalized training, tutors are observed and coached throughout the year, with multiple opportunities for feedback.
4. **Curriculum.** Organizations have structured interventions that work with or within school curricula and align with state standards.
5. **Data.** Data are at the center of the work and are instrumental in driving and tracking student progress and improving instruction.

These findings, along with a review of existing research, provide the basis for the following recommendations.

Recommendations

These recommendations are drafted for those seeking to implement tutoring programs that have a significant impact. Audiences include CNCS staff; CNCS State Offices; State Service Commissions; CNCS grantees; and organizations that host or manage tutoring programs.

Based on these case studies and a review of the relevant research, the author recommends the following as best practices to consider in quality implementation of tutoring programs. It is important for the reader to recognize that this is not an exhaustive list and that these recommendations should be considered as guiding principles:

- Offer tutoring sessions with a low student-to-tutor ratio multiple times a week over a substantial period of time
- Develop partnerships with the district or schools, clearly defined in a formal agreement
- Designate on-site coordinator(s) for the program
- Support tutors through upfront and ongoing training, professional development opportunities, and/or other activities
- Observe and coach tutors throughout the year, with multiple opportunities for feedback
- Use structured curriculum/intervention that can be implemented with fidelity (even as the organization replicates)
- Use data to drive decisions for both individual students and the overall program

Conclusion

This report was written in an effort to better understand the shared elements of effective practice across tutoring programs that partner with national service. These elements form suggested best practices for quality implementation of such a tutoring program.

Next Steps. Based on this research, CNCS may consider taking the following next steps:

- Share findings internally, providing an opportunity to reflect on how these best practices may inform CNCS' work
- Share findings with AmeriCorps and Senior Corps grantees; consider what support and technical assistance may help them in these areas
- Consider how to use the best practices to inform grant competition notices, selection criteria, and technical assistance
- Support new programs considering applying for funds by helping them think through elements of quality implementation
- Consider how AmeriCorps and Senior Corps policies may be modified to better support this type of implementation

Areas for Further Research. This research uncovered several areas worthy of further research, including:

- The potentially enhanced impact of coordination with classroom teachers;
- The effectiveness of small-group tutoring compared with one-on-one tutoring;
- Efforts to increase volunteer tutor retention, one of the biggest challenges for tutoring programs; and
- The applicability of these findings to other educational programs, including whole school interventions.

II. INTRODUCTION

Background & Policy Context

Test scores across the country demonstrate that all students do not have equal access to a high quality education. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress – "the Nation's Report Card" – demonstrate this point: in 2015, approximately two-thirds of fourth and eighth graders scored below proficient on the reading assessment, and gaps persist based on race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status.[i] While these data are actually demonstrative of an upward trend since the early 1990s, they also indicate an uphill battle.[1]

In an effort to reduce such disparities, lawmakers have implemented policies aimed at supplementing classroom teaching to support students most in need. This is particularly true when it comes to literacy. In the 1990s, the Clinton administration launched the "America Reads Challenge," a national initiative established to connect young volunteers with K-3 students who were struggling to read at grade level. Under George W. Bush, the No Child Left Behind Act required underperforming schools with a high percentage of low-income students to set aside a significant portion of their federal (Title I) funds to provide "supplemental services," including tutoring.[2] The Every Student Succeeds Act, which became law in December 2015, softens this requirement, with a provision that permits states to reserve up to three percent of their Title I funds for "direct student services," including "high-quality academic tutoring" – for which there is no explicit definition.[3]

It is generally accepted that tutors can improve literacy outcomes of students. Yet studies – from meta-analyses in the 1990s to recent impact evaluations – show that not all tutoring programs are created equally.[4] National service offers a cost-effective and scalable model for harnessing human capital to improve the academic outcomes of students. With AmeriCorps, Senior Corps and the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) serves schools through school districts and community- and faith-based organizations, which would otherwise need much larger budgets to make an impact. In one tutoring program director's own words, partnering with national service allows such organizations to attract "high-quality, committed, very smart individuals" dedicated to making a difference in the field.[5] It is with this in mind that the following question is examined.

Central Question

A multitude of reading interventions work to improve student literacy outcomes and to reach equity across the education system by offering direct student services, including tutoring. Several

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[i] Socio-economic status is defined by eligibility for free and reduced price lunch under the National School Lunch Program.

[ii] While all three organizations use a one-on-one tutoring model, AARP Foundation Experience Corps and Reading Corps also use small-group tutoring and may embed tutors in certain classrooms. Only Reading Partners offers only

tutoring programs use national service members in their effort to improve student literacy outcomes, offering bright spots in this field: among them are Reading Partners, AARP Foundation Experience Corps, and Reading Corps.

The statistically significant impact of these three programs is well documented through randomized controlled trials (RCTs), as are the best practices of evidence-based tutoring programs generally (see Appendix 1 for a discussion of evidence). This report's contribution is a comparative case study analysis that focuses on service delivery, operations, and overall implementation of these programs to develop a fuller understanding of how they work and to provide best practices for others in the field. The central question of this report is:

What do the service delivery, operations, and overall implementation of evidence-based K-3 literacy tutoring programs using national service members tell us about shared elements of effective practice?

I address this question drawing from the three case studies and existing, relevant research on literacy tutoring and on tutoring generally.

Structure of this Report

This report is structured in the following way:

- **Methodology.** This section provides background on how three programs were selected as case studies and how research was conducted for this report.
- **Introduction to the Case Studies.** This section provides a high-level overview of the three case studies used in this report: Reading Partners (Washington DC); AARP Foundation Experience Corps (at Generations Incorporated, Boston and Revere, Massachusetts); and Reading Corps (Minnesota).
- **Key Findings.** This section describes the key elements of evidence-based K-3 literacy tutoring programs that use national service, in an effort to better understand their service delivery, operations, and implementation. Each key finding is supported by evidence from the case studies, followed by a discussion of what is known from existing literature.
- **Recommendations.** This section offers a set of best practices for quality implementation of a K-3 literacy tutoring program based on the key findings and a review of the existing literature.
- **Conclusion.** This concluding section offers next steps for CNCS and highlights areas worthy of further research.
- **Appendices.** This section provides (1) a literature review of the evidence supporting the three case studies; (2) details on case study methodology; and (3) definitions of key terms used throughout this report.

III. METHODOLOGY

Use of Case Studies

A case study is a research methodology that describes a person, event (situation, experience or decision), or organization – i.e., an examination of one or more "cases" of a phenomenon in an effort to better understand it. Case studies are exploratory in nature and their value lies in uncovering the nuances and detail beneath the quantitative data. This report relies on case studies of three programs conducted through 12 interviews over the course of approximately eight hours (see Appendix 2); a review of materials provided by the programs such as training schedules and memoranda of understanding (MOUs); web-based research (e.g., websites, annual reports); and available impact evaluations and program assessments. The case studies focus on the service delivery, operations, and implementation of the following programs: Reading Partners (Washington DC); AARP Foundation Experience Corps (at Generations Incorporated, Boston and Revere, Massachusetts); and Reading Corps (Minnesota).

Selection of Programs to Study

This report used purposive sampling to determine case studies, intentionally selecting a non-representative sample in order to better understand the implementation of "high fliers" in the field. The three programs selected as case studies for this report were chosen based on their well-documented impact: RCTs of all three programs demonstrate that the programs have a statistically significant impact on the literacy skills of participating students (see Appendix 1). In addition to their demonstrated impact, all three programs use a one-on-one tutoring model; work with K-3 students; have been replicated in multiple states and/or cities; and use national service members and funds in their work. [ii]

These similarities offer the opportunity to study what is shared across programs considered successful in the field, with the hope that this analysis will be helpful to CNCS and to other tutoring programs – both nascent and robust. It is worth noting that while all three of these programs have what can be considered "national offices," this report takes a closer look at program offices in select cities or states (Reading Partners in Washington, DC; AARP Foundation Experience Corps in Boston and Revere, Massachusetts; and Reading Corps in Minnesota) because of their documented impact as well as their willingness to participate.

[ii] While all three organizations use a one-on-one tutoring model, AARP Foundation Experience Corps and Reading Corps also use small-group tutoring and may embed tutors in certain classrooms. Only Reading Partners offers only one-on-one tutoring. It should also be recognized that Reading Partners serves K-4 students, and Minnesota Reading Corps also has a Pre-K program, but all three programs serve K-3 students.

Comparative Case Study Analysis

After collecting qualitative data through interviews, web-based research, and available impact evaluations and process assessments, the cases were each examined across five areas: (1) service delivery; (2) coordination (with and within schools); (3) training; (4) curriculum; and (5) data. These specific areas were examined because they were identified by CNCS Office of Research and Evaluation staff as "common components" across K-12 reading and math programs in their own analysis of evidence-based tutoring programs. This initial analysis suggested that these were areas worthy of this new research. Within each of these areas, qualitative data was compared across the three programs – in a comparative case study analysis – to determine what elements were shared. Those elements shared by all three programs were pulled out as key findings. A web-based search (e.g., Academic Search Premier, JSTOR) of existing literature on the subject corroborated many of these findings and/or indicated where there is need for further research.

Data Limitations

The value of case studies is that such qualitative research captures the story that data does not always tell. At the same time, a reliance on individual experiences and perspectives in qualitative research can minimize its generalizability. The author made every effort to be upfront about the contributions of this research and allay concerns about rigor or bias through systematic research and analysis, as described above.

IV. INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDIES

Reading Partners (Washington DC)

Reading Partners, previously named YES Reading, was established in 1999 when three community leaders launched a one-on-one literacy tutoring program in Menlo Park, California with the intent to support students who had fallen behind in reading.[6] The organization now partners with low-income (Title I) schools to provide one-on-one tutoring, matching community volunteers with K-4 students who are struggling to read at grade level.[7] Reading Partners receives funding from AmeriCorps and from the Social Innovation Fund (SIF). AmeriCorps members serve as on-site and volunteer coordinators in addition to tutoring alongside community volunteers. In School Year (SY) 2014-2015, 12,300 Reading Partners volunteers tutored 8,900 students in 169 partner schools across 10 states and DC.[iii][8] In DC, Reading Partners currently operates 20 reading centers, with more than 1,000 volunteers serving 975 students.[9]

[iii] According to the organization's website, Reading Partners currently operates in the following cities and regions: Baltimore, Maryland; Charleston, South Carolina; Charlotte, North Carolina; Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Los Angeles, Sacramento, Silicon Valley, and the San Francisco Bay Area, California; Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; New York City; Seattle, Washington; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Washington, DC.

AARP Foundation Experience Corps (at Generations Incorporated, Boston & Revere, Massachusetts)

AARP Foundation Experience Corps (also called Experience Corps) is a volunteer-based reading program that recruits seniors – ages 50 and older – to tutor K-3 students who have fallen behind in reading. The program began in the early 1990s as a pilot and joined with AARP in 2011 to become AARP Foundation Experience Corps. Experience Corps receives funding from AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and SIF, and a subset of Experience Corps members are also national service members. Experience Corps members serve as team leads (on-site coordinators) and tutors. The program now has nearly 2,000 seniors – Experience Corps members – serving more than 30,000 students in public schools across 21 cities.[iv][10] In each city, Experience Corps is hosted by the municipality or a non-profit working with seniors or in K-3 literacy. In Massachusetts, Experience Corps is hosted by Generations Incorporated. Generations Incorporated is a K-3 literacy program that uses Experience Corps members to support children from low-income schools struggling to read at grade level.[v] Generations Incorporated has been an affiliate of Experience Corps since 1998 and now operates in 17 schools in Boston and Revere, Massachusetts.

Reading Corps (Minnesota)

Reading Corps was founded in Minnesota in 2003 to "provide emergent literacy enrichment and tutoring to children" in Pre-K and Head Start programs.[11] The Minnesota-based organization is described on its website as "a strategic initiative of ServeMinnesota" – the state's commission for national and community service and administrator for federal AmeriCorps funds. The program began with $150,000 to develop capacity to train AmeriCorps members in early literacy; by 2005, just two years later, the program expanded to tutor K-3 students who have fallen behind grade level in reading.[12] Minnesota Reading Corps works in schools with a substantial portion of students who are not proficient in reading or are at risk of not being proficient in reading; most of these schools are Title-I schools. Minnesota Reading Corps receives funding from AmeriCorps, and AmeriCorps members serve as tutors. There are currently 1,300 AmeriCorps members who tutor with Minnesota Reading Corps in 900 schools across the state. Due to the success of Minnesota Reading Corps, Minnesota Math Corps launched in 2008 and ServeMinnesota founded the nonprofit Reading & Math Inc., which has replicated the programs in Wisconsin and Florida, forming Wisconsin Reading Corps and

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[iv] These cities and regions include: Baltimore, Maryland; the San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento, and San Diego, California; Beaumont, Texas; Boston, Massachusetts; Buffalo, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Cleveland, Ohio; Evansville, Indiana; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Macon and Marin County, Georgia; Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; New Haven, Connecticut; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Phoenix and Tempe, Arizona; Portland, Oregon; and Washington, DC.

[v] Generations Incorporated refers to its Experience Corps members as "literacy volunteers" rather than tutors, and in conversation described the program as a mentoring program. This nomenclature by the organization is intended to convey that the volunteers build relationships with students beyond tutoring. However, AARP Foundation Experience Corps describes Corps members as tutors, and the word tutor will be used in the duration of this report.

Florida Reading Corps. The program has also been replicated through partnerships with community-based nonprofits in nine other states and DC.[vi]

V. KEY FINDINGS

The following are key findings pulled from an analysis of three case studies. These findings are shared across all three case studies, and are organized in the following topics: service delivery, coordination, training, curriculum, and data. Evidence from each of the case studies supports these key findings. Each section is also followed by an investigation of the existing relevant literature.

SERVICE DELIVERY

Organizations serve low-income and high-need schools through one-on-one tutoring or a mixture of one-on-one and small-group (two to four students) tutoring multiple times a week.
- Tutors meet with each student between 60 and 100 minutes, two to five times per week
- Students receive at least 28 sessions on average per school year or exit the program earlier if they meet their reading goals
- National service members serve as tutors/on-site coordinators

Reading Partners DC
Reading Partners works only with low-income schools in urban areas and uses only a one-on-one tutoring model. Community volunteers tutor K-4 students who are behind in reading (generally from six months to two and a half years behind).[13] On average, students receive one and a half tutoring sessions per week or three sessions every two weeks, completing an average of 28 sessions in the program.[14] In pilot efforts in Washington, DC and Tulsa, Oklahoma, a small subset of students receives tutoring three times a week; Reading Partners DC found that these K-2 students actually made more progress than peers receiving two sessions per week (older students also saw growth, but at a slower rate).[15] During school hours, Reading Partners primarily pulls students from reading or English and language arts classes, and they read with their tutors in a designated reading center. AmeriCorps members serve as on-site coordinators in addition to tutoring alongside community volunteers.[16]

Experience Corps at Generations Incorporated
In partnering with literacy organizations, Experience Corps works only with organizations that work with K-3 students from "high-need elementary" schools in primarily urban areas.[17] On its

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[vi] In addition to Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Florida, these nine states use the Reading Corps program: California, Colorado, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, North Dakota, and Virginia.

website, Experience Corps notes that each of these host organization uses at least one of two models: (1) one-on-one tutoring or small-group sustained tutoring, in which volunteers work with students for the school year towards specific goals; and (2) literacy assistance, in which volunteers are embedded in classrooms to help teachers with classroom-wide activities in addition to tutoring.[18] In their work as an affiliate of Experience Corps, Generations Incorporated uses a mixture of both models across two different programs. In their Reading Coaches program, Experience Corps members tutor one-on-one for 30-40 minutes twice a week, with a goal of 35 or more sessions per year.[19] These students are typically pulled out of the classroom to be tutored.[20] Under the Classroom Literacy Program, volunteers spend up to ten hours a week in classrooms, often working one-on-one and/or with small groups of two to three students as directed by the teacher.[21] Experience Corps members tutor and serve as "team leads" (on-site coordinators). A small subset of Experience Corps members are also AmeriCorps members or Senior Corps members (RSVP volunteers).

Minnesota Reading Corps

Reading Corps partners with elementary schools in the state of Minnesota where enough K-3 students are at risk of not being proficient in reading to warrant the tutoring program.[22] Unlike Reading Partners and Experience Corps, Minnesota Reading Corps works with schools in both urban and rural areas. Reading Corps tutors, who are all AmeriCorps members, typically meet with students five days a week for 20-minute one-on-one tutoring sessions. Students are pulled from class to meet with their tutor in a pre-designated space (sometimes just a hallway).[23] Minnesota Reading Corps offers small-group (four students) tutoring in Kindergarten classes. In one elementary school tutors are embedded in K-3 classrooms as part of a pilot.[vii] [24] Students remain in the program until it is determined they no longer have a need.[25] AmeriCorps members serve exclusively as tutors, with on-site coordination handled by school faculty.

[vii] As part of the pilot, 12 AmeriCorps members are embedded in classrooms at the Nellie Stone Johnson Community School (Minneapolis), in a Promise Neighborhood with federal funding to be a Promise Zone. The members are called "scholar coaches" and they work directly with classroom teachers to provide the Reading Corps evidence-based interventions throughout the school day. The intent of this pilot is to make a school-wide impact on student success. Reading Corps is currently studying the program to determine its impact and whether to expand to more schools. One interesting (anecdotal) impact of the program is that it has created an informal teacher pipeline for scholar coaches, who have demonstrated an interest in becoming full-time teachers (Audrey Suker [Chief Executive Officer, ServeMinnesota], in discussion with the author, February 5, 2017).

What We Know from the Literature

Volunteer tutors can improve academic outcomes in tutoring programs.

- An article by Morris (2006) assesses data from five studies of programs that used community volunteers or paraprofessionals as tutors to work with "at-risk" elementary school students. He found that non-certified tutors "can be effective with struggling readers." [26] He attributes this effect "in large part" to the amount of training and supervision by a reading teacher, though he does not provide an in-depth methodological discussion of each study. [27]
- In seminal research Juel (1991) conducted a study of a "cross-age tutoring program" that used college student-athletes who were poor readers to tutor first graders struggling in reading. Students who were tutored saw a substantial increase in their reading comprehension scores on assessments. [28]

Students who receive more than 35 sessions may see greater impact.

- Morrow-Howell (2009) and Lee et al. (2010) reported on a RCT measuring Experience Corps' impact on student reading outcomes in Boston, New York City, and Port Arthur, Texas. They found that students who "received at least 35 sessions made greater gains than control group students" on the majority of reading measures. [29]
- Invernizzi et al. (1997) divided three cohorts of students within the Book Buddies program (Charlottesville City, Virginia), which used volunteer tutors. The authors determined that those who received 40 or more sessions outperformed those who received fewer than 40 sessions, but only on the word-recognition measure. [30]

Younger students tend to see bigger effects on literacy outcomes.

- A widely-cited meta-analysis by Elbaum et al. (2000) finds that "students' grade level was significantly associated with the variation in effect sizes." [31] The mean effect size was "medium" for younger students, while "the mean effect of one-on-one instruction for students in Grades 4-6 was not significantly different from 0." [32] Yet, it is important to recognize that the majority of the students studied in the meta-analysis were first graders; students in higher grades were only represented in five of the 29 studies included. [33]
- CNCS' 2014 impact evaluation of Minnesota Reading Corps found that the magnitude of tutoring effects differed by grade, with the largest effects among the youngest (i.e., Kindergarten and first grade) students, and the smallest effects among the oldest (i.e., third grade) students. [34] There were no statistically significant effects for second graders.

Small-group tutoring may be as effective as one-on-one tutoring.

- Elbaum et al. (2000) found that students in small groups (three to five students) saw the same outcomes as students with one-on-one support. This was based on studies of two programs in which students were tutored by teachers. [35]
- In a study of 77 second graders, Vaughn & Linan-Thompson (2003) compared groups with ratios of 1:1, 1:3, and 1:10 and found no statistically significant difference "in the magnitude of the progress between the three groups." [36]
- Gersten et al. (2009) assessed 11 studies that partially or fully met the standards of the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse and concluded that there was "strong evidence" to support small-group tutoring. [37]

COORDINATION

Organizations develop formal agreements with districts and school partners.
- Formal agreements outline expectations for partnership, including but not limited to data-sharing, facilities and materials, and a "fee" for service (cash or otherwise)

Reading Partners DC

Reading Partners DC establishes what is called a "blanket purchase agreement" with DC Public Schools (DCPS), and has MOUs with the charter schools with which they partner. The key components of these agreements are:[38]
- Data-sharing, including the management, oversight and security of data to ensure confidentiality and a protocol for how to respond if data are breached.
- Facilities, materials, and scheduling, specifically a designated space that will serve as a reading center (considered an in-kind contribution) and the expectation that students will be pulled from classrooms to participate in the program.
- Formalized communication, outlining how the organization and school will communicate.
- A fee for service (cash contribution), covering 20 percent of the Reading Partners cost.[39]

Experience Corps at Generations Incorporated

Generations Incorporated has a formal agreement with the school district in Revere and individual agreements with school partners in Boston Public Schools (BPS) – the district is too big to have a single agreement.[40] The key components of these agreements are:[41]
- Data-sharing, including processes for securing student data so it remains confidential.
- Facilities and materials, including an agreement that the school will provide an office with a computer, phone, desk, chair and filing cabinet that locks.
- A fee for service, covering 10 percent of the cost.

Minnesota Reading Corps

Minnesota Reading Corps also has formal agreements with school partners. The key components of these agreements are:[42]
- Expectations around the school partnership, including commitment to the Reading Corps model; AmeriCorps service environment (e.g., facilities and resources such as work space and access to Internet); support from school staff (e.g., administrative staff, internal coaches, and the lead teacher); and responsibilities for internal coaches.
- Responsibilities of Reading Corps staff, particularly master coaches.
- Data and evaluation, including a description of the data collected, how it will be managed and kept secure, and reporting outcomes.
- An "in-kind match" contribution – the equivalent of a "fee for service" is made as a non-monetary contribution including: space, office furniture, phone and Internet, computer, photocopies, and the internal coach's time.

> **On-site coordinators are embedded in a tiered staffing structure aimed at supporting tutors and students.**
> - On-site coordinators are responsible for implementing the program at the school level and serve as the primary liaisons between tutors, teachers, and program staff
> - On-site coordinators may also tutor, assess students, and train and/or coach tutors
> - On-site coordinators are typically supervised and supported by educators or literacy specialists

Reading Partners DC

AmeriCorps members serve as "site coordinators" at each partner school, and as both site coordinators and "literacy leads" in DCPS four days a week. They are supervised by program managers, who are nearly all former educators. As site coordinators, AmeriCorps members are instrumental in implementing the program on a school level, including managing the reading center – a space at each school reserved for the Reading Partners program. In addition, site coordinators serve as a liaison between the program, tutors, teachers, and students by on-boarding and coaching volunteer tutors; coordinating tutoring schedules; and collecting student referrals from teachers. In DCPS, the site coordinators are supported by "literacy leads," who are also AmeriCorps members. Literacy leads may be considered as "expert tutors," in that they tutor every day and are continuously attending trainings on literacy best practices. Even with this additional support, it is estimated that 20 percent or more of a site coordinator's time is also spent tutoring.[43]

Experience Corps at Generations Incorporated

Staff at Generations Incorporated select high-performing Experience Corps members who demonstrate strong leadership skills to serve as on-site coordinators, referred to as "team leaders," at each school.[44] Team leaders are supervised by "cluster managers," who are typically former educators. Currently, no team leaders with Generations Incorporated are national service members, in part because the team leaders are consistent from year-to-year and may stay at the same school for many years.[viii] Team leaders are in schools for approximately 15 hours each week, spread over three days. Each team leader also has a designated assistant team leader who performs their duties one day a week, for a total of four days per week in school. The team leaders are the "boots on the ground" in terms of volunteer management and each one oversees up to 30 volunteers at a school. Team leaders continuously check in with tutors and teachers, answer tutor questions, log volunteer time, and track student data.[45] They are held accountable for "quality assurance" and building relationships with school faculty and staff, serving as a liaison between full-time program staff, tutors, and school personnel.[46]

[viii] One team leader, for example, has volunteered with Generations Incorporated for more than ten years, serving eight of them as a team leader.

Minnesota Reading Corps

The Reading Corps model provides multiple layers of support for tutors, and, subsequently, for students. "Internal coaches" serve as on-site supervisors and coordinators. Unlike at Reading Partners or Generations Incorporated, internal coaches are current school faculty – typically a teacher or a literacy specialist. The internal coach is trained alongside tutors (all of whom are AmeriCorps members) in the Reading Corps interventions. The internal coach is responsible for actively observing tutors delivering interventions, using a checklist in order to ensure the program is implemented with fidelity.[47] For every Reading Corps tutor in the school, Reading Corps recommends setting aside six hours per month for their observation (a significant portion of each school's in-kind contribution is for the internal coach's time). Internal coaches are also responsible for organizing tutors' schedules and signing off on timesheets.

What We Know from the Literature

The existence of quality on-site coordinators appears to be a factor in a program's fidelity and effectiveness.

- A 2014 MDRC policy brief chronicled the role of site coordinators at Reading Partners, describing the role as "to oversee the [Reading] Center's activities by training and supporting the volunteer tutors; ensuring that students are making gains in their reading abilities; and maintaining positive relationships among Reading Partners, teachers, and students' families."[48] The brief attributes the program's "relatively high degree of fidelity" to several factors, including the "overall quality" of the program staff and AmeriCorps members, describing site coordinators as "dedicated and effective in their work on the whole."[49]
- A 2016 School Turnaround AmeriCorps Evaluation report provided context for 13 programs funded by School Turnaround AmeriCorps grants. The authors used a mixture of "survey, qualitative, and quantitative analyses" conducted over two years.[50] The report identified the existence of an on-site coordinator to manage, organize, and support members and communicate with school staff as one of several "key mechanisms" of effectiveness, along with receptivity of school leaders and collaboration between teachers and AmeriCorps members.[51] These are described as "necessary" conditions for member and intervention effectiveness, though they are not "sufficient on their own."[52]

Collaboration between the program and classroom teachers may be important to an intervention's success.

- In a review of the existing literature Nelson-Royes (2015) argued, "whether a student is tutored in or out of school, collaboration with the student's classroom teacher is vital to a tutoring program's success or failure."[53] In research often cited as supporting this claim, Wasik and Slavin (1993, 1998a, 1998b) studied several effective reading programs, but only one was integrated with classroom instruction. In fact, the effective programs they studied "consistently lacked coordination with classroom instruction," leading Wasik & Slavin to identify this area as worthy of further research.[54]

TRAINING

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Training tutors is an ongoing process that begins with pre-service training and continues throughout the tutor's tenure. Organizations offer:

- Pre-service training that is standardized and provides background on the program, the school system, and the community as well as an introduction to literacy fundamentals and the curriculum/interventions used
- Opportunities for ongoing in-service training, particularly on issues such as literacy fundamentals, curriculum, and using data
- Training, professional development, and other activities that support tutors – whether they are AmeriCorps members or community volunteers

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Reading Partners DC

AmeriCorps Member (Site Coordinator and Tutor) Training. AmeriCorps members serving with Reading Partners go through a 50-hour, three-week training prior to beginning their service. Training materials come from the Reading Partners national office, so that trainings are generally standardized across program offices. This training includes:

- An introduction to DCPS and the Reading Partners program;
- An overview of AmeriCorps (history and commitment to service);
- Details of program operations, including their own roles and literacy fundamentals; and
- Information about the school and community in which they will serve.

This three-week training is standard across the country, with room for nuance based on the school system and community. After the initial training, all AmeriCorps members are required to participate in ongoing trainings throughout the year, on topics such as diversity and inclusion, literacy best practices, resume-building, and the education landscape – offering support for AmeriCorps members in their current role and beyond.

Volunteer (Tutor) Training. There is a separate training specifically for volunteer tutors (with in-person and online components). Volunteers are initially recruited and trained by the Reading Partners engagement team. Volunteer tutors are typically trained for an hour and a half to two hours, during which they are given an overview of Reading Partners before being introduced to the curriculum. After completing this initial training, volunteers go to their schools to observe and to learn from on-site coordinators and literacy leads (called a "Shadow Session").[55] Volunteers continue to be observed and coached by site coordinators, and may also participate in trainings offered each month, on topics like curriculum.[56]

Experience Corps at Generations Incorporated

Experience Corps (Tutor) Training. Full-time staff train new Experience Corps members and observe them regularly. Tutors, including national service members and community volunteers, receive 10 hours of pre-service training. This training includes:[57]

- An introduction to Generations Incorporated, with an overview of the programs offered and the work that they do;

- A discussion of what it means to be a mentor and what makes a positive mentor;
- An understanding of social-emotional learning;
- An overview of a K-3 classroom and classroom management, including aspects like diversity, multiple languages, and use of technology; and
- An introduction to literacy and curriculum, including state standards.

Experience Corps members who are also national service members complete a national service orientation. Once tutors are on-boarded, they have the opportunity to observe one-on-one or classroom sessions, and they typically observe for their first day. Tutors may choose to participate in a yearly retreat and other outsider-facilitated and district-led trainings, which they attend alongside paraprofessionals and educators.[58] Finally, it is worth noting that Experience Corps members have the opportunity to participate in meaningful activities beyond volunteering, such as lunches or "coffee chats" to support seniors and build a community.[ix]

Minnesota Reading Corps

Before AmeriCorps members enter the schools where they will tutor, Minnesota Reading Corps holds a three-day joint "Summer Training Institute" for both tutors and internal coaches. Training is typically done by master coaches, who are literacy experts.[59]

AmeriCorps Member (Tutor) Training. AmeriCorps members attend all three days, plus a one-day AmeriCorps orientation. During the Summer Training Institute they receive in-person training including:

- An introduction to the Minnesota Reading Corps program model;
- An introduction to the program's 10 scripted reading interventions and the underlying research behind the interventions;[60] and
- An overview of how to implement these interventions.

Members are also given a "Literacy Handbook" that provides an introduction to the program, procedures for monitoring student progress, and instructions for conducting interventions.[61] This is supplemented by online videos of "interventions and best practices" so that tutors can return to the training to reinforce what they learned at the institute.[62] Minnesota Reading Corps' master coaches provide the one-day AmeriCorps orientation, which varies by region but always introduces tutors to the mission and administration of AmeriCorps.[63] Once tutors are on site for 30 days, they receive trainings on assessments and the Reading Corps data management system so they can input and access student data.[64]

Internal Coach (On-Site Coordinator) Training. New internal coaches attend all three days of the Summer Institute, and returning K-3 coaches attend for just half a day.[65] In addition to the tutor training for AmeriCorps members, internal coaches also receive:

- Information about their own roles, responsibilities and expectations, particularly around ensuring the fidelity to the Reading Corps model, orienting the AmeriCorps member(s) in the school, and organizing the tutoring and professional development schedules; and

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[ix] Indicative of this support, when one tutor's husband died of cancer, she called Generations Incorporated to ask staff "to get the girls together" for a coffee chat (Mary Gunn [Executive Director, Generations Incorporated] and Kendra Mrozek [Program Director, Generations Incorporated], in discussion with the author, January 10, 2017).

- An overview of the program's organizational structure, including the roles of master coach and program coordinator.[66]

In addition to formalized training, tutors are observed and coached throughout the year, with multiple opportunities for feedback.
- On-site coordinators observe and coach tutors to ensure the program is implemented with fidelity
- Managers of on-site coordinators, typically former educators, visit each site to support on-site coordinators in this work

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Reading Partners DC

Tutors are coached both formally and informally by site coordinators and program managers – program managers are almost all former educators. Tutors receive written feedback through formal observation sheets, which are used depending on the purpose of the feedback.

Experience Corps at Generations Incorporated

In addition to the 10 hours of pre-service training, tutors receive 15 hours of coaching and training via monthly team meetings. Throughout the school year, cluster managers – who are generally retired educators – and team leaders are present in the classrooms to observe tutors, so there are many opportunities for coaching. In addition, tutors have check-ins with teachers once a month, and – even more formally – twice a year. Tutors also have a mid-year and end-of-year review with their cluster manager, during which they set their own goals, reflect on their work, and receive feedback.[67]

Minnesota Reading Corps

Internal coaches actively observe each tutor for approximately six hours per month, ensuring that the program is implemented with fidelity (relying on a "fidelity checklist").[68] In addition, tutors receive ongoing coaching from both internal and master coaches, who are teachers and literacy specialists. In monthly meetings, internal and master coaches provide feedback and make suggestions to improve instruction.[69]

What We Know from the Literature

Outcomes for students with tutors who were community volunteers were higher for those whose tutors implemented the program with fidelity.

- In their meta-analysis, Elbaum et al. (2000) assessed a study by Vadasy et al. (1997) that found "the effect size associated with consistent tutors" (those who maintained fidelity) was larger than the effect size "associated with inconsistent tutors."[70]

Tutees with tutors who received ongoing trainings outperformed others.

- Meier & Invernizzi (2001) studied the Book Buddies program (Bronx, New York) and found that tutors who used well-structured lesson plans and received ongoing training and supervision were more effective.[71]
- Wasik & Slavin (1993) found that students with tutors who received ongoing training outperformed those students whose tutors who did not receive trainings in a tutoring program in Miami-Dade County, Florida.[72]

Tutors need ongoing assessment and feedback.

- In their study of the America Reads program, Roe & Vukelich (2001) found that assessment must be "ongoing," with feedback given to both tutors and students. Assessment and feedback were connected to ensuring fidelity.[73]

Training may increase tutors' skills and confidence in their work.

- Kim & Warren (2013) examine the impact of professional development on strengthening the effectiveness and engagement of college students tutoring K-5 English language learners in urban environments and found that "strategic training" is important to increasing "their skills and confidence in providing literacy support for children."[74]

CURRICULUM

Organizations have a structured curriculum/intervention that works with or within school curricula, including state standards.
- Interventions are developed by literacy specialists/experts
- Interventions are structured and lesson plans are largely scripted, so the program can be implemented with fidelity (even as it is replicated or scaled up)
- At the same time, interventions are flexible enough to allow for adjustment based on data collected on student progress

Reading Partners DC

Reading Partners uses a scripted curriculum that is standardized across all program offices and sites. The curriculum is developed by an advisory committee of literacy experts and is grounded in evidence-based research, providing easily administered, "targeted instruction and practice of

foundational literacy skills."[75] It is aligned to the Common Core State Standards, other state standards, and best practices in reading instruction.[76] There are three levels of curriculum, depending on the students' skill levels: emerging readers, beginning readers, and comprehension readers. Across all levels, Reading Partners focuses on the five building blocks of literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. While it is not a linear progression, the emerging readers curriculum tends to focus more on phonemic awareness, and beginning readers on phonics.[77] The curriculum includes 10-12 texts (both fiction and nonfiction) housed in the reading center's read-aloud library.[78]

Experience Corps at Generations Incorporated

Experience Corps requires the use of a curriculum that aligns with the district's implementation of state standards and any curriculum used by an Experience Corps affiliate must be approved by the school in which it operates.[79] In SY 2014-2015, Generations Incorporated partnered with the American Reading Company (ARC) and adopted ARC's curriculum. ARC's curriculum aligns with the Common Core State Standards and works within BPS' kindergarten and first grade curricula.[80] In each sustained tutoring session, tutors work one-on-one or with small groups of students to build phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and writing skills.[81] Generations Incorporated provides materials – like word and phonics drills – for each session, but classroom materials are also made available to volunteers.[82] Tutoring sessions follow a certain structure: one-on-one and small-group sustained tutoring sessions include an activity to introduce a new book, a preview of difficult vocabulary, a "joint reading session," and creative writing or drawing.[83] With literacy assistance sessions, the teacher is able to weave volunteers into the classroom where they are needed. Knowledge of lesson plans provides volunteers with flexibility and the ability to support the work being done in the classroom that day. [84]

Minnesota Reading Corps

Minnesota Reading Corps does not consider its interventions in terms of a curriculum, but instead as "curriculum-neutral," suggesting that they can be implemented in any classroom. Minnesota Reading Corps has a set of scripted interventions that have been written by literacy experts, who drew on the work of other researchers to ensure that the interventions align with the literacy skills that every student needs.[85] The goal of these interventions is to ensure that each child has a foundation on which to build as he or she gets older. These interventions work on phonological (phonemic) awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.[86]

DATA

Data are at the center of the intervention and are instrumental in driving and tracking student progress and improving instruction. Organizations:
- Continuously assess students to collect student-level data, which are used to direct individual instruction for students and analyze trends at the school-level
- Implement a data feedback loop including program staff, tutors, and teachers
- Establish data-sharing provisions in agreements with school and district partners
- Monitor and track student progress through basic (e.g., hard copy files, Google Sheets) and more complex data management systems

Reading Partners DC

Reading Partners collects survey data – including information on skills and attitude toward learning – from the student's teacher once a student is part of the program, and again at the mid-year and end-of-year mark. Each student in Reading Partners is formally assessed three times a year (a national requirement).[91] The program office initially uses this information to place students within the reading curriculum and later uses it to see if students are meeting their goals. This helps to "highlight areas in which a student might need particular attention" and the site coordinator and program manager update each student's reading plan based on this information mid-year.[92] These data are continually shared with school leaders and teachers (formally at the beginning, middle, and end of year) and are typically shared with the district at the end of the year. Reading Partners also collects summative data from school partners and districts to make sure students are making progress at the school-level. This data sharing is outlined in a blanket purchase agreement with DCPS and in an MOU with each charter school.

In addition to these assessments, site coordinators in DC assess students monthly via "progress monitoring," which assesses students on high frequency words, word features, and a running record. These data are analyzed by the site coordinator, literacy lead, and program manager. They are then communicated to the student's volunteer tutor via the student's hard copy folder – which houses instructions for each lesson – to help focus sessions.[93] This information is regularly communicated to teachers either formally or informally, depending on the teacher's preference. Reading Partners' emphasis on collecting good data and on using data to make decisions was a motivating force behind creating a data and evaluation associate position – unique to the DC program – to have someone dedicated to auditing and analyzing data full-time.[94]

Experience Corps at Generations Incorporated

Like Reading Partners, Generations Incorporated has data agreements included in formal agreements – an MOU with Revere Public Schools and individual MOUs with principals at BPS. Data agreements may take years to develop; they vary by district, because each district collects different data and uses data differently. Generations Incorporated works with BPS' data and accountability office, which typically shares data from assessments given across all BPS at the beginning and end of the year. After collecting the data and storing it in their SalesForce database, Generations Incorporated sends the data to AARP Foundation Experience Corps to analyze it and translate it into a grade-level equivalency. Generations Incorporated collects its own data through an annual teacher survey from Experience Corps. Generations Incorporated also has a hard copy tracker for each student, including notes from tutors, who are responsible for filling out a template after each session saying what skills the student worked on and the challenges the student faced in the session.

Minnesota Reading Corps

Data play a key role at Minnesota Reading Corps, in screening students for eligibility, monitoring students' progress toward "clear literacy targets," and in making organization-level decisions.[95] Teachers typically refer students to Reading Corps and they are then assessed using a curriculum-based measurement. Reading Corps tutors administer weekly one-minute "fluency probes" to students in the program and create individual student graphs to illustrate progress.[96] Student graphs include an "aim-line" from the student's baseline score to his or her grade-level target score.[97] These data are used by tutors and internal coaches every day to adjust interventions to provide better instruction and improve student outcomes. Tutors and their internal coaches allocate 10-15 minutes per day to discuss students and their progress. Once a month, the internal coach, master coach, and tutors meet for a more comprehensive review of every student's graph.[98] Reading Corps has its own data management system that tutors can access virtually to see the screening assessment, data, and progress of each of their students. This system was developed as a more cost-effective and dynamic alternative to previous systems. The national office, Reading & Math, Inc., gets all the data from affiliates across the country in an effort to ensure the model is being implemented with fidelity as it is scaled.

Data are used constantly to drive research and innovation at the organization-level. An annual evaluation report helps to understand trends and think about how to improve the model in ways that will have an impact. For example, Reading Corps found that students were exiting the program, but were still not passing the third grade reading assessment. In analyzing the data, they believed it was an issue of vocabulary. Reading Corps received funding via United Way (through

SIF) to study this hypothesis, building interventions and assessments to improve K-1 vocabulary and see what impact it would have. This is still in the pilot stage.[99]

What We Know from the Literature

Evaluation helps an organization be as effective as possible.

- As Royse et al. note in their book *Program Evaluation: An Introduction to an Evidence-Based Approach* (2015), program evaluations allow an organization to determine if services are "helpful, ineffective, or harmful" by systemically assessing programs to determine if they "are having the desired impact."[100] (Though it is also important to recognize that a badly designed evaluation can actually impede progress.[101])
- In their study "AmeriCorps Tutoring Outcomes Study," Moss et al. (2001) found that regular program evaluation was one of four effective practices "significantly associated" with student gains. The other three were: meeting at least three times per week, coordinating with classroom instruction, and pre-service and ongoing training for tutors.[102]

A tool (e.g., template, checklist) should be used in the tutoring session to record student learning.

- In a series of pilot studies, Gordon et al. (2004) implemented an "Individualized Instruction Program" for adults and children who were tutored at home, school, a community center, or a workplace. They found that a diagnostic template helped to organize and implement a tutoring program and that checklists helped to track student progress each session.[103]

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations provided in this section are based on shared elements of effective practice in implementing K-3 literacy programs that use national service members and funding from CNCS in their work. They were identified through a comparative case study analysis across three evidence-based programs: Reading Partners (Washington, DC); AARP Foundation Experience Corps (at Generations Incorporated, serving Boston and Revere, Massachusetts); and Reading Corps (Minnesota). They are also grounded in the existing literature on tutoring programs.

Based on this research, the author recommends the following as "best practices" in supporting the quality implementation of such a program. In addition to each of the best practices, the author has included promising practices – pulled from evidence presented by one or more of the case studies or the existing literature – to consider in implementation. Together, these were drafted with multiple audiences in mind: CNCS staff; CNCS State Offices; State Service Commissions; CNCS grantees; and organizations that host or manage tutoring programs and want to implement them more effectively. In considering these practices, it is important for the reader to recognize that this is not an exhaustive list and that these recommendations should be considered as guiding principles.

Offer tutoring sessions with a low student-to-tutor ratio multiple times a week over a substantial period of time. Consider:

- A higher total number of sessions (aiming for 35) may be most effective
- The frequency (suggested 2-3 times a week) may be more important than the length of tutoring sessions

Develop partnerships with district or schools, clearly defined in a formal agreement. Consider:

- Data-sharing, including how student data will be kept confidential and what protocols are in place if data are breached
- Expectations around school and program staff support and use of school facilities, including space, phone, Internet/e-mail, and a locked filing cabinet
- Fee for service, including how much the school or district is expected to cover (cash, in-kind, or both) to support program operations

Designate on-site coordinator(s) for the program. Consider:

- This person may be a community volunteer, a national service member or school staff (e.g., a reading teacher, curriculum specialist)
- This person typically has more knowledge (about the program, literacy fundamentals, and curriculum) than the average tutor
- This person serves as a facilitator between the program, teachers, tutors, and students and will be responsible for program implementation at the school-level

Support tutors through upfront and ongoing training, professional development opportunities, and/or other activities. Consider:

- Providing training for tutors in the program model, curriculum, assessment and data collection so that tutors implement the intervention with fidelity and are confident in their abilities to work with students and improve student outcomes
- Offering professional development (e.g., networking sessions) and activities (e.g., lunches, coffee chats) to support and connect tutors so they feel they are part of a community

Observe and coach tutors throughout the year, with multiple opportunities for feedback. Consider:

- Building time for formal tutor observation and feedback by literacy specialists, who may be school or program staff
- Creating opportunities for ongoing informal observation and feedback

Use structured curriculum/intervention(s) that can be implemented with fidelity (even as the organization replicates). Consider:

- Using a curriculum/intervention that is developed with input from literacy specialists and aligns with and supports state standards and/or district curricula
- Ensuring that this curriculum/intervention is flexible enough to respond to student progress and student needs
- Ensuring that tutors have the necessary materials to implement this curriculum, including materials from school partners

Use data to drive decisions for both individual students and the overall program. Consider:

- Developing systems to record data securely in order to maintain confidentiality, though student progress may also be tracked with even basic systems (e.g., hard copy folders)
- Incorporating data in a "feedback loop" to ensure that tutors use the data to direct tutoring sessions and that teachers have the data to know how their students are performing
- Evaluating the program annually, to think about ways the program can improve to have a greater impact

VII. CONCLUSION

This report was written in an effort to better understand the shared elements of effective practice across tutoring programs that partner with national service, seeking to address the following question:

What do the service delivery, operations, and overall implementation of evidence-based K-3 literacy tutoring programs using national service members tell us about shared elements of effective practice?

In addressing this question, the author assessed elements of the service delivery, operations, and implementation of three evidence-based K-3 literacy tutoring programs: Reading Partners (Washington, DC); AARP Foundation Experience Corps (at Generations Incorporated, serving Boston and Revere, MA); and Reading Corps (Minnesota). In a comparative analysis of these case studies, this report identifies several common elements across the programs that may be useful to CNCS staff; CNCS State Offices; State Service Commissions; CNCS grantees; and organizations that host or manage tutoring programs and want to implement them more effectively. These elements form suggested best practices for quality implementation:

- Offer tutoring sessions with a low student-to-tutor ratio multiple times a week over a substantial period of time
- Develop partnerships with the district or schools, clearly defined in a formal agreement
- Designate on-site coordinator(s) for the program
- Support tutors through upfront and ongoing training, professional development opportunities, and/or other activities
- Observe and coach tutors throughout the year, with multiple opportunities for feedback
- Use structured curriculum/intervention(s) that can be implemented with fidelity (even as the organization replicates or scales up)
- Use data to drive decisions for both individual students and the overall program

Next Steps

Armed with these key findings and best practices for quality implementation of K-3 literacy tutoring programs using national service members, CNCS may want consider taking the following next steps:

- Share with staff at headquarters in Washington, DC, and in state offices so they are aware of these findings and have an opportunity to reflect on them and how these best practices can be used to inform their work. State offices may benefit from a conference call or webinar providing an overview of the report.
- Share with AmeriCorps and Senior Corps grantees to ensure they are aware of these common elements of evidence-based programs, and consider what support and technical assistance can be offered to grantees to help them in this area.

- Consider the ways in which AmeriCorps and Senior Corps policies may be modified to better support this type of implementation and provide flexible incentives to those interested in participating in national service no matter their stage in life.
- Use the best practices for implementation to inform grant competition notices, selection criteria, technical assistance, and monitoring to ensure that programs achieve these quality benchmarks in their implementation.
- Support new education programs considering applying for funding, by helping them to understand some of these shared elements.

Areas for Further Research

This research indicates several areas in this field that warrant further research.

Effectiveness of Small Group Tutoring. A well-cited meta-analysis by Elbaum et al. (2000) found that students in small groups (three to five students) saw the same outcomes as students with one-on-one support, though the data are limited. A more recent study by Gersten (2009) found that there is strong evidence that small-group tutoring is effective. Research in this area is critical because cost of implementation is a strain even on evidence-based programs partnering with national service. If students see statistically significant improvements in literacy outcomes, small-group tutoring would be a much more cost-effective and efficient approach.

Coordination with Classroom Teachers. Research is inconclusive on the need for integration with classroom instruction. Wasik and Slavin (1993) studied five effective reading programs and found that only one program was integrated with classroom instruction; later, Wasik (1998) described coordination with classroom coordination as critical to success. Discrepancies on this topic are summarized in a 2007 report published by Schultz & Mueller of Minnesota's Amherst H. Wilder Foundation and suggest that this is an area worthy of further research.

Efforts to Increase Tutor Retention. One contribution of this report is the finding that all three organizations offer opportunities for tutors beyond tutoring. This includes ongoing trainings in topics like curriculum and professional development sessions on networking and diversity and inclusion. AARP Foundation Experience Corps even offers "extracurricular" activities to engage senior volunteers. Volunteer retention was the number one challenge mentioned by those familiar with each organization, indicating it is worth exploring cost-effective ways to engage and retain tutors – particularly volunteers. An exit survey for volunteer tutors could be one simple way for organizations to begin this research.

Application to Other Education Programs. It would also be helpful to understand how these findings may be relevant for other education interventions that tutor in different subjects or offer whole-school interventions, such as City Year's "Whole School, Whole Child." Shared elements of effective practice identified in this report may be benchmarks of quality across many – if not all – education-focused programs as well as in education broadly. It would be interesting to apply a similar methodology across other programs to examine this question.

VIII. APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Discussion of Evidence

All three of the organizations studied in this report have randomized controlled trials (RCTs) demonstrating the statistically significant impact of the program. It is for this reason that they are referred to as "evidence-based" programs, and their impacts on student outcomes are catalogued below.

Reading Partners

1. Jacob, Robin Tepper et al., "Reading Partners: The Implementation and Effectiveness of a One-on-One Tutoring Program Delivered by Community Volunteers," MDRC, June 2014.

This policy brief reports the early results of an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Reading Partners program, conducted during School Year (SY) 2012-2013. The authors evaluated Reading Partners in 19 schools in California, New York, and Washington, DC, with a final sample size of 1,166 students randomly assigned to the treatment and control groups. Students in the treatment group received Reading Partners, while students in the control group did not participate in Reading Partners but were eligible to participate in other supplemental services.

Among the key findings:

- The program was implemented with fidelity, which was quantitatively measured by researchers with a "fidelity index." This index was based on "core components of the program: (1) regular one-on-one tutoring; (2) dedicated school space and use of materials; (3) data-driven instruction; (4) rigorous and ongoing training; and (5) instructional supervision and support."[104]
- The program "had a positive and statistically significant impact on all three measures of reading proficiency": reading comprehension, fluency, and site-word reading. The effect sizes were 0.10, 0.09, and 0.11, respectively.[105]
- The amount of supplemental instruction that students in Reading Partners received was only about one hour more than students in the "as is" control group.[106]

2. Jacob, Robin Tepper et al., "Mobilizing Volunteer Tutors to Improve Student Literacy: Implementation, Impacts and Costs of the Reading Partners Program," MDRC, March 2015.

This study reports on an evaluation of the Reading Partners program and builds on MDRC's June 2015 policy brief. In particular, it explores whether the program is more or less effective for certain subgroups of students.

Among the key findings:

- The program was implemented with a "relatively high degree of fidelity to the program model."[107] Students received tutoring, on average, one and a half times per week and spent 28 weeks in the program.
- The program had a positive and statistically significant impact on three measures of reading proficiency: reading comprehension, fluency, and site-word efficiency. These impacts are estimated to be equivalent to up to two months of additional growth for those in the program compared to the control group, and were "robust" across student subgroups.[108]
- The program had a positive and statistically significant impact on "at least one measure of proficiency" for the following student subgroups: males, females, English language learners, students fluent in English, students in grades 2-3, students in grades 4-5, and "students with baseline reading comprehension scores in the lowest three quartiles of the study sample."[109] The study did not break student subgroups down by race or family income.

AARP Foundation Experience Corps

1. Gattis, Maurice N. et al., "Examining the Effects of New York Experience Corps Program on Young Readers," *Literacy Research and Instruction,* 49: 4, 299-314, September 2010.

This article presents findings on reading achievement from an evaluation of New York Experience Corps operating in the New York School District in SY 2006-2007 (note that Experience Corps no longer operates in New York City). A purposive sample of six elementary schools participated in the study. The sample size was 254 first and second graders, with 123 in the treatment (participating in the Experience Corps program) and 131 in the control group. The control group received regular classroom instruction. The sample included English language learners and students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Key findings:

- Experience Corps in New York City was effective in improving reading performance. The effect size (0.20 to 0.49 on statistically significant findings) was "substantial." The authors also described these effects as "remarkable," given that Experience Corps uses community volunteers.[110]
- On alphabetics and phonemic awareness, students were more likely to get over the benchmark on the PALS assessment than control students.

2. Lee, Y.S. et al., "The Effect of the Experience Corps Program on Student Reading Outcomes," Washington University in St. Louis, September 2010.

This is one of two reports evaluating a randomized field trial of 883 students (first through third grade) at 23 schools across Boston, New York City, and Port Arthur, Texas. This study used a purposive sample of New York City elementary schools. Nearly 25 percent of the students in the sample spoke English as a second language and that approximately 15 percent had IEPs. Research was conducted by researchers at the Center for Social Development at Washington University's George Warren Brown School of Social Work, qualitative and quantitative data was collected by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Key findings:

- Students in the treatment group had higher post-test scores than those in the control group on three reading measures: word attack (sound-letter correspondence), passage comprehension, and grade-specific reading skills. On the passage comprehension and grade-specific reading skills, this difference was statistically significant (0.13 and 0.16, respectively).[111]
- In exploring the program effects based on dosage, the authors found that students participating in Experience Corps who received at least 35 sessions (which was considered the "full intervention") made greater progress than students in the control group on word attack, passage comprehension, and grade-specific reading skills.[112]

3. Morrow-Howell, Nancy et al., "Evaluation of Experience Corps: Student Reading Outcomes," Washington University in St. Louis, January 2009 (updated June 2009).

This is one of two reports evaluating a randomized field trial of 883 students (first through third grade) at 23 schools across Boston, New York City, and Port Arthur, Texas. The study methodology is described above.

Key findings:

- Reading scores of students who were referred to the program were "very low."[113]
- Effects of the program were consistent across subgroups. Program impact was generally the same no matter gender, ethnicity, grade, classroom behavior or English language proficiency. Students with IEPs did not benefit from the program as much as students without an IEP in reading comprehension.
- Program "effects were stronger" for the subset of students who received at least 35 sessions when compared with both the control group and with Experience Corps students who received fewer than 35 sessions.[114] About 50 percent of students in the Experience Corps program received between 30 and 49 sessions, with 76 percent receiving over 35 sessions. Based on the distribution of the number of sessions received, the authors chose 35 sessions as the cut-off to see if students received the "minimum dosage" of the program intervention.[115]
- Teachers "overwhelmingly" described the program as "beneficial to students" and found that the program was no or a low burden for them.[116]

Minnesota Reading Corps

1. Markovitz, Carrie et al., "Impact Evaluation of the Minnesota Reading Corps K-3 Program," NORC at the University of Chicago, March 2014.

CNCS sponsored an RCT to evaluate the impacts of the Minnesota Reading Corps Program in SY 2012-2013. A sample of 1,530 eligible K-3 students was randomly assigned to either a treatment or control group prior to tutoring. AmeriCorps members collected data from students each week for 16 weeks during the school year. While the RCT was conducted by researchers at the University of Chicago, the program used AmeriCorps members to collect data rather than a

third party. For this reason, the RCT was not accepted into the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse.

Among the key findings:

- The program had a statistically significant impact on kindergarten, first and third graders (with the smallest impact for third graders). There was no impact on second graders.
- The program had statistically significant impacts across race, gender, dual language learner status and Free or Reduced Price Lunch status.
- The program is replicable; student scores did not vary based on tutor characteristics (e.g., gender, race, age, education, full or part time status, education) or by the school at which tutoring occurred.[117]

2. Hafford, Carol et al. "Process Assessment of the Minnesota Reading Corps," NORC at the University of Chicago, February 2013.

In 2012, NORC at the University of Chicago completed a process assessment of the implementation of Minnesota Reading Corps across 20 pre-K and K-3 sites. The goal was to understand how the program was implemented and to identify facilitators and barriers in terms of effective implementation. The report also makes several recommendations for program replication and scaling. As part of this research, teams of two conducted one-day visits to each of the 20 selected sites and conducted in-depth individual interviews and/or focus groups.

Among the key findings:

- Minnesota Reading Corps has a "comprehensive training regime and a multi-layered supervisory structure" which were "critical" to effective implementation. The Summer Institute is a "particularly effective mechanism" for training.[118]
- There was consensus among individuals interviewed at sites that students were making progress and were "on track to meet their targets."[119]
- AmeriCorps members, serving as tutors, had diverse backgrounds.
- The program is a "highly adoptable model."[120]

Appendix 2. Case Study Methodology

Interviews

From January to March 2017, the author conducted 12 interviews over approximately eight hours with senior leaders and staff familiar with each of the three programs that serve as case studies in this report:

1. Shannon Kane, Program Director and Katie Nicolle, Data and Evaluation Associate at Reading Partners, Washington DC;
2. Mary Gunn, Executive Director and Kendra Mrozek, Program Director at Generations Incorporated; Keanne Henry, Vice President, AARP Foundation Experience Corps;
3. Audrey Suker, Chief Executive Officer, ServeMinnesota, and Sadie O'Connor, Managing Director, Reading & Math, Inc.

The author used the following questions to guide the discussion and followed up with clarifying questions by phone and e-mail (see "Additional/Follow-up Questions" below).

General questions:
- What are the components you find contribute most to success?
- What could smaller, less-resourced programs do on a "shoestring" budget?
- What are the challenges and restraints you face in this work?

Training for delivering services:
- What are the qualifications of the trainers?
- What are the modalities (e.g. role play, direct instruction) of training?
- What is the duration of pre-service training and how is pre-service training delivered?
- What is the duration of in-service training and how is it delivered?
- What do programs feel is essential regarding what is covered in pre-service versus in-service training? How is sequencing considered and is it important?
- What are the big "buckets" covered in training?
- What materials are used in training?

Use of data and investment in data systems:
- What is the purpose of collecting data?
- Who in the program is focused on data? Who has access to the school's data and the program's data?
- How do programs interface with schools to use the data?
- How frequently does the program analyze student data to assess progress?
- What is the data feedback loop? In other words, how does the data impact the intervention? To what extent?

Implementation and on-site coordinators:
- Is there an on-site coordinator, and if so, who? How do they fit into the program and the school's management structure?
- What is the role of the on-site coordinator and what are his or her daily tasks?
- Who at the school makes the most sense to serve as the on-site coordinator?

Additional/Follow-up Questions:

In asking these initial questions, several other topics rose to the top in these conversations. These include: the organization's mission and theory of change, funding streams, and school partnerships. On these topics, the following questions were asked in initial and subsequent interviews:

- What is the organization's mission and theory of change?
- What are the organization's sources of funding?
- How are school partnerships developed and are they formalized? What goes into formal agreements with school partners

Web-based Research

The comparative case study analysis summarized in this report was conducted primarily through interviews with senior leaders and staff familiar with each of the three programs that serve as case studies. A total of 12 interviews over approximately eight hours were conducted from January to March 2017. For a list of questions that guided these interviews, see Appendix 2. Interviews were augmented by both web-based research (e.g., websites, annual reports) and publicly available documents, specifically:

Reading Partners (Washington, DC)

- "Vision and Values," Reading Partners, accessed 22 March 2017, available at: http://readingpartners.org/about-us/vision-values/
- "Reading Partners: Unlocking student potential by raising student achievement," accessed 22 March 2017, available at: http://readingpartners.org/
- "Mobilizing Volunteer Tutors to Improve Student Literacy: Implementation, Impacts and Costs of the Reading Partners Program," MDRC, March 2015, available at: http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/ReadingPartners_2015_FR.pdf
- "Reading Partners: The Implementation and Effectiveness of a One-on-One Tutoring Program Delivered by Community Volunteers," MDRC, June 2014, available at: http://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/Reading%20Partners_final.pdf

AARP Foundation Experience Corps (Generations Incorporated, Boston and Revere, MA)

- "AARP Foundation Experience Corps," AARP Foundation Experience Corps, accessed 22 March 2017, available at: http://www.aarp.org/experience-corps/
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Minnesota Reading Corps

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Appendix 3. Key Terms

Academic outcomes. "Academic outcomes" or "student learning outcomes" are the learning standards or objectives of a particular educational experience. Outcomes encompass the skills, knowledge, and abilities that a student is expected to learn. A student enrolled in a literacy tutoring program, for example, may be expected to reach proficiency in outcomes like phonemic awareness or reading fluency.

Evidence/Evidence-based. There are several reputable sources that house reports on the evidence of education interventions, including CNCS' own Evidence Exchange and the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse. Across the field, there are different terms used to describe various levels of evidence. In this report, "evidence" and "evidence-based" mean that data from a randomized controlled trial or quasi-experimental study (see below) demonstrate that the intervention has had a statistically significant impact on relevant academic outcomes for participating students.

Intervention. "Intervention" is defined by the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse as "an educational program, product, practice, or policy aimed at improving student outcomes." In this report, it is generally used as a synonym for an educational program – specifically a tutoring program – but may also refer to the specific strategies employed by the program during tutoring sessions.

National Service. For the purposes of this report, "national service," refers to programs funded by CNCS, the federal agency with a mission to "improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering."[121] In this report, "national service members" refers to individuals who have committed to service through the AmeriCorps or Senior Corps programs.

Literacy. "Literacy" is generally understood as the ability to read and write. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) defines reading literacy as "understanding, using and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society."[122] This is the definition used for the purpose of this report.

Proficiency. "Proficiency" in this context can be linked to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results, which are presented as reading achievement levels by the National Assessment Governing Board to measure how well a student's performance matches the achievement expected at grade level. There are three achievement levels: basic, proficient, and advanced. Students at the proficient level "have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter."[123]

Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT). A "randomized controlled trial" is typically considered the "gold standard" in statistical analysis. Put simply, it is a study in which participants are randomly assigned to a treatment and a control group, with the intent of measuring the outcome or impact of the treatment. In this context, the "treatment" is a literacy intervention.

Tutoring program/ Tutor. "Tutoring programs" encompass a variety of models, including computer-based programs and programs that use classroom teachers to employ certain interventions. For the purposes of this report, the term "tutoring program" refers only to in-person programs that do not rely on classroom teachers, but instead on community volunteers (members of the broader community) or national service members. These programs occur during regular school hours, and do not offer homework help. Within these programs, tutors are defined broadly using Merriam-Webster's definition: "a person charged with the instruction and guidance of another."

Quasi-experimental study. An "experimental study" is a study in which there may not be clear or randomized treatment and control groups.

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